2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

The chief identifies a man who comes to see him in exactly the same way, and the Administration has adopted a similar system, except that it has its own definition of the village. During the initiation ceremonies, the initiands[1] are housed in long grass sheds which are subdivided into sections. Each section or room of the long shed houses the boys or girls from one village. If villages share a burial ground, they have allotted portions where they bury their dead separately. In these and many other ways the village is looked upon by the Yao as a distinct unit in the chiefdom.

The chiefdom in the old days was distinctly a territorial unit and all the villages within that area recognized the superiority of the chief. The boundaries of the old chiefdoms were marked by rivers and hills and fixed after conquest and agreement. They are still well remembered. Modern chiefdoms are defined in their limits partly by Government decree and partly by custom. When Principal Headmen were appointed, the districts under them were demarcated with 'due regard being given to the composition of the Native population'. The traditional areas under the various chiefs, therefore, were recognized by the Administration as districts, so that the districts or their sections almost coincided with the chiefdoms. Some disputes between chiefs over boundaries have occurred from time to time and the Administration has had to arbitrate. For example, the Provincial Commissioner of the Southern Province reported a difference between Liwonde and Kawinga in 1936,[2] but through time these differences have been eliminated.

Traditional and Administrative boundaries do not coincide in a few places, for two reasons. Firstly, the Administration has accepted an obvious and physical boundary in preference to an indistinct and social boundary. It has taken the Domasi River as the boundary between Ntumanje and Mposa, though in fact a few villages under Mbela, Kawinga III's son, live on the south side of the river, and fall for Administrative purposes in Ntumanje's area. Mbela is still very strongly associated with Kawinga in ritual and kinship matters. His dealings with the

[1] I am grateful to Prof. Schapera for suggesting this word for those who are undergoing initiation ceremonies. The parallel is with graduands, i.e. those who are undergoing graduation ceremonies.

[2] *Report of the Provincial Commissioner, Southern Province* (1936), 20.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

554 622 692 These headmen who are the centres of local social structure are the higher headmen that MacDonald mentions.[1] Many of them to-day are the descendants of the traditional councillors (*ndunu*) who were sent out to the extremities of the chiefdoms to be the outer governors in these areas.[2] Their villages are social centres in that many disputes are taken to these important headmen before they are taken to the Native Authority's court. For example, the dispute between the women of Nampeya and Cikuwita was taken to Ntilwilibwi.[3] The chief usually orders headmen to assemble at the villages of important headmen when he has directions to issue to them. Very frequently the Administrative officers camp there for the night on their tours and call the headmen in to them for conference. The placing of mosques 554 622 at the villages of these important headmen also indicates their significance as social centres. Most Moslem villages have small ● 346 mosques which the more devout use for the morning and evening prayers during Ramadan only. At the villages of important headmen larger mosques have been built and these are used for the midday prayers on Fridays (*Jumu*), when most of the Moslems in each area assemble in their best clothes for communal prayers. Large brick mosques have been built at the court villages of Jalasi, Liwonde and Kawinga. There are other large mosques at the villages of chieftains such as Chiwalo, Chamba, Mposa, and of important headmen such as Kangomba, Nyenje and many others. These chiefs and headmen were all Invaders and are, as I shall show later, almost by definition Moslems. They are also headmen of high rank so that the placing of the mosque, and the other features of local social structure, are largely derivatives of the system of ranking.

554 622 Rank therefore underlies the structure of local areas as well as the structure of the chiefdoms as wholes. It is, as I show later, closely associated with the historical origin of the headmen. Yet the correlation is not perfect and I shall show that other factors tend to militate against the fixed historical ranking of headmen. Nevertheless, the principle of primacy is the most important single factor.

[1] See Chap. II, p. 36.
[2] See Chap. IV, pp. 92-3.
[3] See Chap. V, p. 150.

3:Stanmus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

against all evils — witchcraft, attack by lions, etc. The *akamusi* then set about building shelters in which the *wali* will remain during their term of instruction. According to the number of the *wali* so the number of places where shelters are built may vary from one, two or three, to as many as eight. Each of these places is called *Ndapala*. They may be many miles apart and are so placed for the convenience of the mothers in various groups of villages who bring the food daily to the group of boys from those villages.

The boys when they originally left the village were wearing a large bark-cloth covering, with beads and calico, which latter articles have been taken by the *m'mchila* and his assistants. At *Ndapala* they wear simply a loin-cloth of bark.

During their stay at *Ndapala*, the *wali* are given animal names by the *akamusi* who carry on the instruction of the boys until their return to *Lupanda*, the *m'mchila* having gone back to his village immediately after the circumcision. The names given to the boys are commonly names of beasts of prey such as Alikule (*likule* = the jackal), Achisuwi (*chisuwi* = the leopard), etc.

Certain restrictions as to diet are laid upon the *wali* by the *m'mchila*, e.g. no meat of an animal killed by a beast of prey, no mudfish, *likumbala*. He will not allow any villager to visit *Ndapala* after seven P.M. and visitors may only be men who have been through the ceremony. An uncircumcised man is called *mbalale*, one who has not been to his *Unyago*.

Other restrictions as to foodstuffs may be made by the *akamusi*, generally in connection with the mythical origin of such food substances. A finger-shaped yam called *lipeta* is taboo, as it is said to have first sprung from the grave of a leper, the inference being obvious. After the *Unyago*, the boys have to undergo a special doctoring before they may partake of them. Bananas and rice are similarly refused them, the latter on account of a story to the effect that rice grew from the nostrils of a dead man, the idea doubtless having relation to the resemblance of rice grains to maggots. Fish is denied them by some masters of ceremonies, as it is said to have originated from the diaper of a woman which she threw away while bathing.

Each *m'mchila* may have special observances of his own. One near Zomba caused all cassava to be roasted in a certain way. Rows of pieces of cassava were placed in split bamboo splits and so roasted before the fire in the manner of fish. If roasted in the ordinary way, the cassava would split and show the white floury material inside, signified by the verb *ku-lapala*. If this is eaten by the *wali*, it is said that the preputial wound would reopen.

The length of time spent at *Ndapala* varies from four weeks to as long as three or four months. In the first place they must wait till the circumcision wounds of all are completely healed. Delay may be occasioned by complications having arisen in some cases. Again, permission to return may be withheld by the chief for some reason or other. Should one of the *wali* die at *Ndapala*, the body is buried out in the bush and nothing is said to the parents until after the ceremonies are over and all have returned to the village.

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

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2. A BIT OF YAO LAND

4. GRANITE WORKED WITH CUP-HOLES FOR THE GAME OF *Bao*

346
531
177

1. A MOHAMMEDAN MOSQUE DECORATED WITH GEOMETRIC DESIGNS OF COAST ORIGIN

3. A SPRING AND SNARE TRAP FOR SMALL ANIMALS

[End Plate 4]

7: Hetherwick M-5 (ca. 1900) 1902 FT7 Yao FT7

present fortunes. But it is to the human soul after death, when it is considered as having an influence on the lives and fortunes of those it has left behind in the world and consequently as a power to be propitiated and honoured, that the term *mulungu* is more strictly applied. Freed from the body it passes to *mulungu*, and there is regarded as endowed with powers which it never possessed when alive on earth. To pray to such a spirit is described as *kulomba mulungu*, to worship *mulungu*, never *kusopa* in this case. Such *mulungu* worship enters largely into Yao religious or social life. In almost every Yao village there will be found a shrine which is the centre of the worship of the inhabitants. It consists of a carefully built hut enclosed within a strong grass fence or hedge of a species of cactus plant. The hut itself is built of the usual native materials—the walls of wooden posts, bamboos, and strong reed grass bound together with bark-rope and plastered over with clay or stiff mud. The roof is of grass laid on a framework of bamboos, and is generally covered with long strips of white or coloured calico. On the ridge or apex of the roof are fixed a couple of flags or an umbrella or two. One wall is usually left open so that the interior is easily seen. Within, from the bamboo rafters are suspended handkerchiefs, cloths, bunches of beads, etc., all offerings to the *mulungu* of the dead headman or chief from his friends and relatives. The floor is of clay carefully smeared with sand in native fashion. A raised platform or mound of earth in the centre marks the spot where the grave was made. The *awilo* or officials who preside at the funeral obsequies, first dug for about 8 or 10 feet down in a perpendicular direction, and then on the western side of this well they hollowed out a shallow cave in the earth. In this the body was placed, laid on its side with the knees bent up under the chin, and the face turned towards the east. Various articles of personal property were next placed beside the corpse, clothes, ivory, guns, axes, hoes, etc., and the mouth of the cave closed up with wooden posts and a strong reed mat. The grave was then filled in and the surface carefully finished as we have seen. At the head of the mound a native pot was fixed in the ground for the reception of the offering of beer which is an almost invariable accompaniment of any act of worship paid to the *mulungu* of the dead.

. Such a shrine marks the grave of almost every Yao chief or headman, and is regarded as the abode of his soul or the spot where his *mulungu* is most accessible. If his successor is about to undertake a long journey or enter on any warlike expedition against an enemy or neighbour, he must first *kutaya mbepesi*, place an offering here to secure the favour and assistance of the *mulungu* of the dead. Should a long-continued drought endanger the prospects of the grain crop, the departed chief must be solicited to send the lacking rain. A feast is first prepared, almost always of beer, sometimes with the addition of native porridge, fowl, or game. The worshippers gather round the shrine bringing part of the food which they have prepared. Their priest for the occasion is the successor of the dead chief, sometimes one or other of the *awilo* who placed the body in the grave, or it may be that any other near relation of the dead man is chosen to represent the people and act as their spokesman. The nearer the relationship the more influence will he have with the dead.